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A SPEECH

ADDRESSED

TO HIS CONSTITUENTS,

In the Corn Exchange, at Oxford, on December 21, 1874.

BY

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As the Reports which have been published of this Speech have been, many of them incorrect, and all of them incomplete, I have thought it better to print it as it was delivered.

W. V. H.

January 4, 1875.

SINCE I was last in this place, to use a phrase which has become classical, "a good many things have happened." It is just about a year ago since I stood here to submit myself to your judgment in the unfamiliar situation of a newly-fledged official; and now that I have perished in my infancy, men may safely pronounce me happy. Well, gentlemen, the storm came down upon us. It was one of those circular hurricanes which sometimes ravage the political tropics, and blow from all quarters in turn. Those who watched the barometer of the public mind had for some time observed that, as the weather reports say, "pressure was everywhere falling," and warning voices had been heard—from this platform amongst others—against carrying too much top-hamper. However, it caught us all standing; we were taken aback and dismayed in a twinkling. No doubt it has been a great catastrophe. A large part of the crew have been washed overboard. Some of them escaped, as the patient Job remarks, "by the skin of their teeth." A few were cast up on the desert island of the House of Lords; and my old colleague, whom we all remember and regret, is living a sort of Robinson Crusoe life there. But the Oxford lifeboat picked me out of the wreck, and here I am to hang up my dripping garments and return thanks in the temple of the Corn Exchange; no longer, it is true, Solicitor-General, but what I care about a good deal more, by your indulgence still member for the City of Oxford.

If I were to say that the revolution of last winter took me by surprise, I should state that which I know, and which you know, not to be the fact. It is said that every one is convinced that he can poke the fire better than any one else, and

so each man fancies himself the wisest political prophet in the world. You will, therefore, forgive me if I am not superior to this vulgar weakness, and remind you that when I spoke to you here before, I told you several things were about to happen—first, that a general election was not far off; next, that when it came we should all be turned out; and lastly, that I, for one, should not make myself miserable over that event. Now, gentlemen, I will take the liberty to affirm that the last of these predictions is just as accurate as the two first have proved themselves to be. I don't make myself unhappy, first, because I have always observed that those who are most sorry for themselves are least apt to inspire compassion in others; but principally, for the reason I then mentioned to you, that practically the affairs of the country have been carried on, as I was sure they would be, upon the same principles as those upon which they were previously conducted. I told you then that "they might get rid of the Government, but they would not get rid of our principles." They have got rid of the Government, but our principles remain. The coach is really travelling on the same road, you have only changed the coachman and the horses. One whip may be better, and one team may be smarter and sounder than another. Opinions will differ on that matter; I have my own, but there is no particular use in expressing them just now. When this team is blown another will not be wanting. It is quite enough for me to know that the chariot of the State is not standing still, and that, if it does not bowl along quite as fast as some of us could wish it, it is not going backwards. That is not the merit of the last Government nor of this Government. It is due to the fact that all Governments act, and must act, under the controlling force of public opinion. And, in my judgment, he is the best politician who occupies himself most about the

sound state of the opinion of the nation and least about the accidental fortunes of administrations. The eccentricities of party are controlled by that great central force of moderate and moderating opinion which defines their orbits and which gives them even a calculable period. And so our political system rolls on in its large ellipse, neither flying off into space at a tangent nor tumbling into the centre for lack of motion. For this reason it is that England has, amidst all the vicissitudes of party, remained a well-governed, because a self-governing, people. We have had a Conservative reaction, but we have not had a political revolution. I always thought we should have the first, but I never for a moment feared that we should encounter the second. When the present Government came into power they found a fine surplus ready made to their hands; and they dealt with it very much as their predecessors would have done, except that they made half a bite instead of a whole one at the Income Tax. In opposition, the country gentlemen talk about repealing the Malt Tax, but when they get into office they never think of doing anything half so foolish—not even when they have a surplus of £6,000,000. And thus the change of Government helps you to put an end to the cry about the Malt Tax. We used to hear a great deal about the dreadful state of the Army, and the disgraceful condition of the Navy. We shall hear no more of all that; it has answered its purpose; it turned out a Government. But now we are all quite satisfied both with our Army and our Navy, though they are just as before, and the estimates will remain what they were. The humiliating foreign policy of the late Administration was loudly condemned. Now, if the foreign policy of England had really been about to be changed it would have been a very serious matter. But when we are told at the Mansion House that the “moral influence of

England consists in not giving advice when it is not asked," that is a conception of the authority of Great Britain amongst nations with which I am sure the President of the Peace Society will not quarrel, unless he should consider it somewhat tame. And Prince Bismarck, whatever he may think of the Pope, has certainly no cause to complain of want of affability in a Tory minister. In the case of the Endowed Schools Bill, no doubt, the horses bolted and the coach was nearly upset in the ditch; but the leaders' heads were pulled straight just in time, and by a severe application of the double thong, the wheelers were forced to tug the vehicle out of the mire, and no great harm happened.

Some of my friends think this all very dreadful, and allow themselves to be greatly provoked at it. They say, "What a shame it is that these men who have got our places should be doing just the very same thing as we should have done!" Well, I don't agree in that. You can't scold a nation into giving you a majority any more than you can tease a lady into accepting your hand. It may be very bad taste on her part, but if she prefers a rival, why, you cannot help it. There is no use going about protesting you are the best-looking fellow of the two, though you feel all the time she has made a very bad choice. To speak seriously, so far from its being a bad thing, it is a very good thing that one Government should adopt and confirm the policy of another. It adds the sanction of both parties to the same course. It gives a solidity to the political system of the country; it seals the past, and it makes the future more secure. So far then from making myself unhappy about all this, I should have been much more unhappy if it had been otherwise. I cannot complain if these Conservative gentlemen pay to the Liberal party the greatest compliment one man can offer to another—that of imitation.

Indeed they have carried this species of flattery almost to excess. They caricature even our faults, as the Chinese potter copied the crack in the pattern plate—for they have done what I thought impossible, they have made the Licensing Act even more vexatious than it was before. The Liberal creed is not an exclusive faith; we are not a “peculiar people” nor a “chosen race,” but, like good Christians, we rejoice in the multitude of our converts. I see Lord Selborne expressed a hope the other day that the Liberals would not become Tories. I don’t see much fear of that; it appears to me much more likely that all the Tories will become Liberals by-and-by—and the sooner the better. It is the old story—

*“Grecia capta ferum victorem cepit, et artes
Intulit agresti Latio.”*

The Liberal party vanquished at the hustings have led captive the fierce Conservative reaction, and inspired Liberal sentiments even in the breasts of the country gentlemen.

But there is another set of friends of mine who hold a different language, and one in which I still less agree. They say, “Look at these fellows, they are borrowing all our principles: we must manufacture new ones by way of distinction, or we shall never get back again.” This is not at all my view of political life, nor does it seem to me by any means consistent with public honour. Opinions do not become any the worse because other people adopt them; and I have always thought that office is desirable in order to carry out the opinions you already entertain, and that you should not invent opinions in order to get office. And therefore I reject altogether those “cries” which we are recommended to take up in order to secure power. Power comes soon enough to

those to whom it comes on honourable terms. I do not think it is a very dignified attitude to go about the country, or up and down periodicals, speculating when and how we may get back to place. Just as if we were so many frozen-out fox-hunters swearing for a thaw, and watching with impatience for the first drops that trickle from the eaves. There is plenty of "bone in the ground" just at present, but I have a pleasant confidence in the vicissitudes of the political atmosphere. I don't believe in perpetual congelation; we shall have plenty of open weather yet. Only for heaven's sake don't let us sit and sulk in a corner, or pout like a naughty spoiled child, who, because he can't get his own way in everything, cries out, "I won't play any longer!"

But whilst it is a good thing not to be dashed by disaster, it is not a bad use of adversity to endeavour to understand its causes; and so we may become not sadder, but wiser men. I observe that some gentlemen think that the misfortunes which have overtaken the Liberal party are due to the fact that they were too virtuous. That is a very consolatory theory if we could only get people to believe it; for there is no error which is more easily amended. But though it is a very pleasant delusion to persuade oneself that all the catastrophes which occur are due to one's excellences, my experience of life leads me to believe that they are much more often attributable to one's faults. In this particular case I am rather disposed to think that the disorder from which we are suffering is not an uncommon one—that of too many doctors and too much physic. Each of our many political apothecaries declares that the prostration of the patient is due to his not having swallowed sufficient of some favourite specific. Everybody advertises himself as the only really "earnest" practitioner, and prescribes pills, and potions, and blisters, and if they do

not answer the purpose, why then more pills, and potions, and blisters; and then, when the party is at the point of death, they say it is all because he has not had pills, and potions, and blisters enough. Now this hygienic practice cannot be said to have been found singularly successful, and, therefore, like the rest, I will volunteer a different diagnosis, which, I fear, will not be very acceptable to the college of political quackery. In my opinion we are suffering from over-dosing; the body politic is congested by a treatment which, in the cant language of the day, I believe is called the "earnest system," which consists in cramming down the throats of mankind all sorts of stuff, without the least consideration of the capacity of the people to assimilate or digest it. That is neither good medicine nor is it good statesmanship. I read the other day a very wise saying of Mr. Fox, borrowed from an old Greek physician—"The second best remedy is preferable to the best, if the patient likes it better." You cannot govern a people without some regard to their sentiments, to their convictions, or even to their prejudices. In leading a party, as in riding a race, the first essential is to be a good judge of pace. I should recommend a return to a rational regimen. You will not restore the healthy tone of an over-excited system by blazing rhetoric and sensational pamphleteering. The fresh air and exercise of the opposition benches is bracing and invigorating, and with a little rest will soon prove restorative. If any medicament is wanting, I would prescribe a few grains of the salt of common sense, as a gentle alterative, to be taken night and morning, and we shall soon be about again.

It would be unfair and unjust to lay the fault of the defeat of the Liberal party wholly at the door of the late Administration, though of course, like the generals of a beaten army, they must take their share of the blame. But they

were, I think, at least as much the victims as the authors of the disaster. They were harassed by the demands of discordant sections, each peremptorily insisting upon measures upon which their party was not agreed, and to which the nation would not consent. The chiefs were called upon to storm positions which they knew to be impregnable, and to conduct a plan of operations in which there was no harmony. In such a situation discomfiture was inevitable. The whole force was clubbed, thrown into inextricable confusion, and routed horse and foot. If you will believe me, the Liberal party has suffered not for the good things which it has done—which were many; but for the nonsense it has talked—which was too much; or rather which has been talked for it by those who have assumed, with mighty little authority, to speak in its name. The Liberal Administration was not dismissed because the country disapproved its policy. The best proof of that is that the Government which has succeeded it has confirmed and adopted that policy. No, gentlemen, the late Government fell not for anything that it had done, nor for anything which it had proposed to do. The distrust under which it succumbed was due to an uneasiness as to what it might or might not be forced at any moment to do. This country does not love a Government which is capable of nothing; but there is one thing which it fears still more, and that is a Government which is capable of everything. It has a wholesome dread of parties of sensation and of the politics of surprise. It is necessary that a nation should know what its Government intend, but it is still more essential that they should feel an assurance as to what it does not intend. In public, as in private life, the first title to confidence depends upon the conviction that the course which will be steered is determined by fixed charts and is not at the mercy of variable

currents and fitful blasts; that as there are fixed resolves which direct a firm advance, so there are paths into which a Government will not drift and into which it cannot be driven. The lesson to be learnt from this great disaster is, that Parties who wish to be trusted must have the courage to "put their foot down." To extend a covert toleration to rash speculations and impracticable schemes in order to secure a precarious support is not the way to recover confidence, but further to destroy it.

We have going on amongst us a doctrine of development promulgated by most multifarious infallibilities. There is our old friend Sir Wilfrid Lawson, the Pontiff of Total Abstinence—a gentleman whom, however much we may differ from him, it is impossible not to respect for his sincerity and to admire for his humour, for, in spite of his principles, he is always brimful of spirits. He excommunicates all us poor heretics who do not embrace his immaculate dogma. For my part, I endure his anathemas with resignation. He is particularly wrath with me, and calls me a "Protestant." Well, so I am, and therefore I stick to the principle of private judgment even in the matter of beer. Then there is another gentleman who fulminates his dogmas from the *cathedra* of the *Fortnightly Review*, and pronounces—without the consent, so far as I know, of any general council—on the future state of the Liberal party. He has his syllabus, too, and he formulates a creed quite Athanasian in its obscurity, and not less damnable in its clauses. And then these gentlemen lament the catastrophe of the Liberal party and deplore the want of unity in its action! You cannot get unity on the terms of insisting that every one else shall agree in your own opinions. I cannot help thinking that it is very hard upon the Liberal party to be held responsible before the country for all this

farrago of crotchets. You cannot jumble up a mass of crude nostrums, huddle them before a reasonable nation, and call them a policy, without revolting its common sense and creating inevitable reaction.

And yet, agreeing in nothing else, I find that these peremptory instructors of ours are set upon one thing—and that is, to denounce the Whigs. Who are the persons designated by a title, which I suppose is intended to be opprobrious, I do not exactly know; but, as far as I can ascertain, they mean all those persons who hold moderate Liberal opinions—those opinions which in my belief constitute the staple political sentiments of the English nation. Now, if those who proscribe Whig opinions had ever contributed one half as much to the reputation of the Liberal cause, or to the practical business of political reform, as the Party which they depreciate, they might command more respect for their denunciations than they are at present likely to receive. I have, myself, no objection to persons who compliment themselves on what they are pleased to call “advanced opinions;” nor do I dispute the superiority they claim above the majority of the human race. But then they should reflect that the advantage on which they pride themselves depends on the fact that there is an inferior order of beings who are not quite abreast of themselves. If we were all as wise as they are, they would not be such superior persons as we all admit them to be; and if there was no one behind these gentlemen of “advanced opinions” they would not have so much to boast of, for they would be no more “advanced” than their neighbours. These political Uhlans are admirable skirmishers, but they don’t win pitched battles; and I should recommend them not to despise or insult the mass of the army on whom they are inevitably driven in as soon as they meet the enemy, or to discard those

reserves and supports upon whom, in the long run, depends the fortune of a campaign. No people and no party is wise which seeks to break altogether with its past. That is the error which the French committed at the end of the last century, and they have never recovered it. The Whig tradition is the inheritance of the Liberal party, and the Liberal cause will gain nothing by discarding it. In it are enshrined those principles of religious toleration and personal freedom which have regenerated the political system of this country. They are as necessary—perhaps more necessary—against the new despotisms which menace us to-day than they were against the old tyrannies which they have already vanquished. They may require to be enlarged as time goes on, but they are not to be rejected. The Whig party have never been the party of destruction. They could not be so, because they have always been the party of reform; and reform is the antidote to destruction. If those who demand subversion repudiate and ostracise those who adhere to reform, they will neither unite a party nor will they reassure a nation. No party ever yet flourished which proceeded on the principle of expelling from its ranks its moderate members. They are generally the wisest, and therefore the most influential, of its constituents. I have been, I confess, shocked to see the language addressed to those who are unwilling to be precipitated into extreme courses. It is assumed that the hopes of power will induce them to consent to anything or everything of which they disapprove. The people who hold this tone know very little of the spirit and character of the party against whom they vent their taunts. They will find that men of moderate opinions have something far more at heart than the acquisition of office, and that is to prevent the Government of this great empire from falling into the hands of politicians who, rejecting the

established traditions of the Liberal party, run after every new-fangled doctrine and every raw speculation.

You will ask, "Is there then nothing to be done?" Yes, gentlemen, there is plenty to be done. I will mention only two out of many things not at all destructive, but quite the reverse, which are awaiting a solution. First, there is the reform of the laws relating to labour. I have spoken to you before on that subject, and I have nothing to change or to add. You know that a Royal Commission has been appointed to consider the subject. It was said that the Commission would report in time for legislation last session. I felt sure that pledge could not be redeemed, and I therefore declined a seat upon the Commission which was offered to me, because I considered it would lead to an unnecessary delay in a matter upon which we had already abundant information. The subject, I think, cannot fail to be taken in hand next session, and I trust that the good sense of Parliament will settle it upon the sound basis of the absolute freedom of labour and the repeal of restrictive legislation. There is another great question, perhaps not yet equally ripe, but which is fast maturing—I mean the amendment of the laws relating to land. Those who are interested in agriculture are becoming every day more alive to the mischief of the shackles by which the free dealing with the soil is restrained, and the necessity of affording more security to those who embark their capital in farming. It is only from the fund of larger and safer profits that the miserably inadequate wages of the agricultural labourers can be permanently augmented. I spoke to you at length on this matter last year, and I shall not enter into it now except to express the satisfaction I feel in observing the awakened and the growing interest which this important subject commands. It is impossible that we can continue to pay to foreign nations some

seventy millions of money every year for produce which, under a better system, might, at least in great part, be raised at home. With this matter the question of the Game Laws is intimately connected. My views on that subject are too well known to you to make it necessary that I should repeat them now. I think that these are matters which may much more profitably occupy our attention than schemes for dismembering the Empire or destroying the Church.

After what I have said you will not expect to hear from me any petulant or captious criticisms on the transactions of last session. It is a subject which was never important, but which is now worn threadbare. There is, however, one class of questions which I cannot altogether pass by. I wish I could; but they have of late so engrossed the public mind that it is impossible to be altogether silent upon them. In England, as well as abroad, the ecclesiastical topic, like Aaron's rod, seems to have swallowed up all the profane snakes. It is positively dangerous to walk about the streets, for folios of canonists and casuists come tumbling about your ears like chimney-pots in a gale of wind. Now, of all matters with which politicians have to deal, theological affairs are the most dangerous to handle. They are a sort of dynamite, which blows up when you least expect it; and when you once kindle the blaze no man can tell when it will be quenched. No public man who has a due sense of responsibility will set flames to such a material unless under the pressure of some absolute necessity, and if compelled to deal with it, he will restrict himself within the exact limits of political action. There is nothing more dangerous or more mischievous than to confound the province of practical statesmanship with that of theological controversy. If you are called upon to act, whatever may be the difficulty of these questions, you may be compelled to deal with them. But the error which

is most strenuously to be avoided is that of denouncing men whom you cannot and do not intend to control, and of needlessly arousing the bitterest of all sentiments, that of theological hatred, in the breasts of the different sections of a people which embraces various creeds. No true Liberal will have any difficulty in steering his course on such questions. The principles of the Liberal party on these matters have long been fixed and are clearly marked out. After generations of controversy there are two great maxims firmly established. The first—that with respect to all creeds which ask and receive nothing of the State, no man should be better or worse treated, regarded, or spoken of, on account of his religious opinions. Secondly, that in the case of a religious establishment which receives and enjoys privileges and endowments under the guarantee of the State, those who accept the benefit should be compelled to observe the conditions and obey the law by which they are prescribed. You may call these Whig principles if you like, but in my opinion they are true principles, and my conduct has been and will be regulated by them.

Now, adhering as I do to the first of these principles, you must not expect me to join in an onslaught on my Catholic fellow subjects. You will not suspect when I say this that I entertain any sympathy with their opinions or their system; but, as a politician, it is no part of my business to undertake the office of a controversial theologian. I see no necessity—certainly none that has newly arisen—for attacking the Catholics, and if there is no necessity there is great mischief in it. When we reflect that the Catholic subjects of the Queen form a fifth of her English-speaking people—and especially if we regard their distribution in Ireland and Canada—we shall not forget the wise saying of Burke, that “he did not know how to draw an indictment against a

whole people." But the Catholics of the United Kingdom are far more numerous than those of whom Burke thus spoke. I may disapprove—as I do—of their religious system, but I cannot impeach a community which forms so great a fraction of this empire—which fills with distinguished men its civil service—which fights its battles and which mans its fleets—men who, according to my observation, are not less worthy in their conduct as members of society and as subjects of the state than we who differ from them—I cannot, I say, impeach five or six millions of Englishmen as a suspected class. What is the necessity for such a course?—and if there is no necessity, what is its justification? I am told that something happened in 1870 which has changed the whole situation. If that was so, why is it only now discovered—why was it not before announced? But the truth is there is nothing changed. The pretensions of Rome have always been the same.* Lord Acton, who knows more about the matter than most people, has told us so. It is just the old story which we have heard before, and which those at least who are Liberals have contended against for three generations. If this view of the aims of the Catholics is well founded, the whole legislation of a century has been a fatal mistake, and the traditional policy of the Liberal party must be stigmatized as an egregious blunder. It is said that it is difficult to reconcile the demands of Rome with civil loyalty. It may be so, but there is a logical dilemma still more puzzling, and that is to reconcile professions of toleration with the assumption of Catholic disloyalty. The penal laws and the civil disabilities were based upon this very theory of inherent bad citizenship. And if these assumptions are true, that policy, cruel as it was, must be admitted to have

* See note at the end.

been necessary, and therefore wise. But it was against these very reasonings, and the assumptions on which they were founded, that Burke, and Fox, and Grenville, and Grey maintained a noble resistance, and on account of that resistance submitted to a long exile from power. As a faithful disciple of their principles, I cannot embrace the doctrines which they abhorred. If you really believe that the Catholics are engaged in an organized conspiracy against the civil government, why then you ought to treat them as you do proclaimed districts where the liberty and the protection of the law is suspended for the security of the State. But if you do not really think this—I mean as a practical belief, and not a mere logical speculation—if you are not prepared to act upon it—what can be more idle, what can be more imprudent, than to denounce millions of men whom you have neither the right nor the intention to coerce? In politics it not seldom happens that, of all things, the most delusive are logical demonstrations and rhetorical invectives. There is nothing less wise than to try to drive men into a corner; to prove to them conclusively that they ought to do the very thing which you desire them not to do, and which, if you will only leave them alone, they have not the least intention to do. What is the use of trying to convince men that they ought to be disloyal either to their Church or their country, when they are very ready to be loyal to both, even at the cost of a syllogism? The experience of life teaches us that if few men are as good as their moral professions, happily still fewer are as unreasonable as their theological creeds. Nothing is more practically futile than to hold men responsible for the logical consequences of their principles. Those who employ such a test are probably the men who could least endure its application to themselves. I think ingenuity and eloquence cannot be worse employed than in persuading men, who are

as good citizens as ourselves, that their religion calls upon them to be bad subjects. It may be all very good logic, and unanswerable casuistry, but it is very bad politics. I do not mean politics in a party sense, but in its higher meaning—the polity which aims at compacting the interests and uniting the sections of an entire empire. I do not profess to be deeply versed in the Canon Law of the Mahommedan faith, but I have an impression that it is not very favourable to the authority of infidels. The last thing, however, I should think of doing would be to demonstrate to the Mahommedan subjects of our Indian Empire that they are bound either to abjure the Prophet or to mutiny against the Queen. I have little expectation that they will embrace the first alternative, and I have no wish to drive them to the last. Neither will I take that course with regard to my Catholic fellow-subjects. You might easily found a theory equally injurious to the Calvinists by deductions drawn from the doctrine of predestination. And the conclusions would not be more absurd or untrue than those with which it is sought to fix the Catholics. I look at the actions of men and not at their creed, and if I find that they conduct themselves as good citizens, I am not curious to speculate upon their dogmas nor astute to impugn their loyalty. I have lived all my life in contact with Catholics. I have found them in public and in private as worthy citizens, and as good members of society as other people. I have, I hope, friends amongst them in this city, perhaps on this platform. They are in a small minority, but, to my mind, that is anything but a reason for treating any class of men with injustice; and, therefore, I can be no party to a speculative attempt to fix upon them the odious charge of bad citizenship. When the Ultramontane doctrine assumes the shape of practical pretension, I have always and shall always resist it; and

therefore, when it was proposed to place the teaching of history and philosophy in a national university on a different footing from other subjects as pertaining to faith and morals, and as such belonging to the exclusive cognizance of the priesthood, I resisted that proposal. That would have been to accept the doctrine of the Vatican, and to engraft the Syllabus on the English statute book. We have acted with the Catholics in public life. I cannot turn round on them now and tell them I knew all along they were not to be trusted. We engaged with them in a policy which had for its object the conciliation of Ireland. I, for one, am not ashamed of that policy. But how can you pacify Ireland if you proclaim that the religion to which her people are passionately attached is essentially incompatible with civil loyalty? It would be like trying to wash a blackamoor white. I was a colleague of many Catholics, who held most responsible situations in the Government of the Queen, from the late Lord Chancellor of Ireland downwards. Do you think that I would have been their colleague for a moment if I had believed that on receipt of a telegram from Rome they were ready at any instant to betray their country? I believed nothing of the sort. The principles of the party to which I belong do not allow me to interfere with them on account of their creed, and as I may not interfere with them I see no good in abusing them.

If you will allow me to give you a bit of practical political advice—do not permit yourselves to be embroiled in a controversy which can have no practical result. Do not dispute where you cannot act; and, above all, do not be diverted from mischiefs which you can remedy, by endless discussions about those which you cannot cure. There are things with which you may deal, and with which, in my opinion, you ought to

deal. We have mischiefs far nearer home than the Pope, and priests quite as mischievous as those of Rome. In my opinion, if there could be a more serious error than that of interfering with the Catholics outside, it would be that of palliating and encouraging the conduct of the Romanizers within the Established Church. That would be to imitate the fussy folly of those who meddle in the households of their neighbours, whilst they are blind to the disorders of their own. In the Establishment all the elements which are wanting in the case of an independent religious creed are present. You have the right to act, you have the power to act, and if there is a necessity (as there is) for doing so, you ought to act. And it is for all those reasons that I gave my cordial support to the Public Worship Bill last session. There is all the distinction in the world between the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill—a measure directed against those with whose internal discipline you had no right to interfere—and the Bill of last session, which regulated matters over which Parliament has legitimate control. How any one professing the slightest knowledge of politics could confound two things so exactly the opposite of one another, passes my comprehension. The right of the State to control the conduct of the clergy of the National Church is a thing which will not be disputed by any one who understands the constitution of this country. The Legislature prescribes the terms on which the National Church shall exist exactly in the same manner and by the same right as it defines the conditions on which the Throne shall be filled. Since the Reformation the clergy have never been allowed to settle the national religion, and they never will. I am amazed to hear the term “an Act of Parliament Church” scouted as if it were something strange and horrible. I should like to know how a National Church in England can be anything else but

an Act of Parliament Church. A National Church is, I suppose, a Church established by the National will, and that will can be alone expressed by Parliament—I use the word, of course, in its true sense—the Queen, the Lords, and the Commons. The opposite pretension is, that the National Church is to be settled, not by the Nation, but by the Clergy, not by Parliament, but by Convocation. That is a position to which for three centuries the English people have constantly refused their assent. No one, of course, pretends that Parliament is an absolute judge of religious truth—no more are the clergy. Though when these matters have to be handled, I think that the dignity and decency of their discussion in the House of Commons will lose nothing by comparison with the debates of a Church Congress. The idea of a Church without any particular doctrine, practice, or discipline, is a simple absurdity. This autocracy of individual sacerdotalism where each parson is his own sect, is a thing which no denomination has ever tolerated. The Nonconformists would be first to repudiate such an idea. It is not the clergy who are to dictate to the nation which is the religion they shall establish; it is the nation which prescribes to the clergy what is the religion they shall administer. That is the fundamental principle of the reformed religion and of the Protestant settlement of this country. And if one set of priests refuse to conform, we shall find others, as we have found before, who will obey the national will. The will of the nation in respect of these matters is laid down in the law of the land which affects the National Church, and those who choose to disobey that law must be treated like those who transgress any other law. I am shocked to hear the abuse of the sacred name of liberty in connection with such a subject; there is no word more often profaned, but this is perhaps the most signal instance of its perversion.

When men accept a trust under a sacred obligation to fulfil its conditions, what is the proper name to apply to those who deliberately violate the terms upon which they enjoy their privileges and emoluments? I will tell you what the law and what the conscience of mankind calls them—it calls them fraudulent trustees. And that is what an English clergyman is to be called who deliberately violates the law under which he holds his preferment. Let us hear no more of the cant of liberty then on a subject which is a case of honesty and honour—such casuistry as this confounds the principles of morals and brings truth itself into contempt. One of the great merits of a State Church consists in the fact that the patronage of its chief dignities is placed in the hands of those who enjoy the confidence of the nation. This is a means of bringing the sentiments of the clergy in some degree into harmony with the convictions of the people, and tends to heal that unhappy breach between clerical and lay opinion which is the source of so much mischief. I wish that of late years the object for which this patronage was vested in the Crown had been a little better understood, and then we should not hear language uttered, from Christ Church to Paul's Cross, the object of which appears to be to exasperate the public mind against the Establishment.

I know there are many who think that a National Establishment is a mistake altogether—that is quite a different question. But there can be no defence for those who maintain an Establishment and enjoy its emoluments, whilst at the same time they refuse to fulfil its terms. On the subject of the Establishment I have always frankly told you my opinion, and I have not changed it. These are matters on which men who have undertaken a public responsibility do not lightly alter their views, and I know you would not respect me if I did so. I have been quite surprised, I might say disgusted, at the liber-

ties which some recent speakers have thought fit to take with the name of the most eminent member of the Liberal party on this matter. The opinions which Mr. Gladstone has expressed on this subject are well-known, yet I have seen gentlemen venture to speculate on the possibility of his being ready, at a moment's notice, now that he is out of office, to take an exactly opposite course. Gentlemen, I know nothing in the illustrious career of that eminent statesman which should expose him to so unworthy an imputation. On the part of a political opponent such language would be unpardonable, but what are we to say of it when it proceeds from those who profess to be his most devoted followers and friends? I have never been willing to take part in the destruction of the National Church, because by the constitution of this country it is essentially a Protestant Establishment. I believe that there resides in the State which has declared and guaranteed its Protestant character the power, as there is the right, to maintain, or, if need be, to restore it to that standard. And, if that be so, I am of opinion that a Protestant Establishment is the only power that can effectually cope with the organized forces of Rome. This is a weapon of defence which, consistently with the most complete toleration, we have the right to employ, and which we should be most unwise to abandon. Compared with its powers of resistance, I believe that the efforts of voluntary bodies are feeble. They are like irregular forces contending against a disciplined army. I understand that in Holland, the old head-quarters of Protestantism, since the disestablishment of its Church, the forces of Rome have carried everything before them. And he must be a purblind politician who does not understand that the residuary legatee of disestablishment would infallibly be the Church of Rome. You will tell me, perhaps, that the garrison of the Establish-

ment is not to be trusted. If so, it is a very good reason for changing your garrison, not for blowing up the fort. I am for reforming the Church of England; but till I am satisfied it cannot be reformed I am not for destroying it. When I am convinced that the National Church can no longer be maintained as a bulwark of the Protestant religion, then the object for which it was established will have wholly failed, and the Establishment will cease to exist, because the National Church will no longer represent the sentiments of the nation.

I have said this is a matter with which we have the power to deal, but that is not enough; before we meddle with these questions we must be satisfied that there is an urgent necessity for dealing with them. I am satisfied there is such a necessity. What is the present state of the Church, and what is the conduct of a section—I fear a large section—of the clergy? It is one of which the Church and the nation have had experience before. I will describe it to you in the words of Bishop Burnet. They were written 160 years ago, but if they were an ecclesiastical photograph taken to-day they could not more exactly represent the existing condition of things.

“There are many,” he says, “who profess great zeal for the cause of Establishment, yet seem to be set on forming a new scheme both of religion and Government, and are taking the very same methods, only a little diversified, that have been pursued in Popery to bring the world into a blind dependence on the clergy, and to draw the wealth and strength of the nation into their hands. The opinion of the sacraments being an expiatory sacrifice, and the necessity of secret confession and absolution, and of the Church’s authority acting in independence of the Civil Power, were the foundations of Popery and the seminal principles out of which that mass of corruption grew. They are directly contrary to all the principles on which the Reformation was carried on, and to every step that

was made in it. And yet these of late have been notions much favoured and written for with much zeal, not to say indecency ; besides a vast number of little, superstitious practices that in some places have grown to a great height, so that we are insensibly going off from the Reformation, and forming a new model of a Church totally different from all our former principles, as well as from our present Establishment. What can be said of those who are already going into some of its worst forms of Popery? It is well known that the practice and necessity of auricular confession, and the priestly absolution, with the conceit of the sacrifice of the mass, are the most gainful parts of Popery, and are, indeed, those which most effectually subdue the world and it. The independence of the Church on the State is also contended for, as if it were a design to disgrace our Reformation. The devotions of Rome are openly recommended, and a union with the Gallican Church has been impudently proposed. [The Gallican was a sort of Old Catholic Church.] The Reformers are by many daily vilified, and that doctrine which has been universally maintained by our best writers—the supremacy of the Crown—is on many occasions arraigned.”—Preface to third part of “History of the Reformation.”

That state of things was cured by an effectual remedy. The Crown closed the door of Convocation. And the unwisdom of the counsels under which, twenty years ago, its mischievous action was allowed to revive has been already sufficiently demonstrated. In my opinion the present condition of things in the Church is simply intolerable. And Parliament, which passed the Public Worship Bill by overwhelming majorities, has pronounced it to be so. It is trifling with a serious matter to pretend that this Ritualism is a mere matter of æsthetics ; that it is like a taste for crockery or a fancy for millinery. If that were all, we might treat it with the contempt that belongs to the coxcombrty of a dressy clergy and the gewgaws of a sensuous religion. But every man of common sense knows very well that the importance of these things consists in that which they are intended to symbolize, and the system of which they are only the trappings. You might just as well represent

that when a vessel hoists the red flag it is only an affair of a few yards of bunting. We know the flag well, we perfectly appreciate what it means and what is intended to follow from it. It is the flag of the enemies of the Reformation hoisted by those who are sworn to defend its cause upon the steeples of the National Church. I know the way in which even the name of the Protestant religion is repudiated by men who pretend to be ministers of the English Church. That is a new audacity. Even in the bad days of the Restoration that pitch of licentiousness had not been reached; for we find that the bishops in their discussion with the Presbyterian divines defend the Prayer Book on the ground that "some of the compilers thereof have sealed the Protestant religion with their blood." Yes, gentlemen, they did so in this very city, and they lit a candle which this nation will not allow to be put out by their most unworthy successors.

We hear a good deal now-a-days about a new sect who call themselves Old Catholics. That is a crusade in which I feel no inclination to embark. It is a domestic difference of the Church of Rome, and it is a very pretty quarrel as it stands. If the fleas were unanimous they would pull us out of bed. But it is an affair with which we have nothing to do. We are not Old Catholics, we are Old Protestants. It was against the doctrine of the Old Catholics, and not against the Papal authority alone, that the Reformation was directed. They only delude you who would have you believe that you can embrace the dogma of Rome and yet reject its ecclesiastical system. The dogma is the scaffolding of the edifice. If you once admit the sacramental claims of the priesthood all the rest follows as an inevitable deduction. Once give them this platform whereon they may stand, and they will shake, as they have shaken, the world. These doc-

trines were invented for no other purpose than that of aggrandizing the sacerdotal authority, and of subjugating the human will; it is because they tend to exalt the priesthood that the clergy are always scheming how they may get back to them, and they will get back to them unless the laity keep a tight hand upon their practices. It was this cardinal truth that the authors of the English Reformation, Cranmer, and Latimer, and Ridley, profoundly understood, and they laid down their lives to protest against these sacramental superstitions, which they well knew were the key of the Papal fabric. Therefore, we who hold to the faith of our forefathers have nothing to do with various shades of a system which is fundamentally opposed to that confession, whether they choose to call themselves Catholics, or Old Catholics, or Anglo-Catholics. No, gentlemen, if the Church needs support from without let us not look to the Old Catholics; let us rather turn to a natural alliance with the Protestant Dissenters, whom an unwise policy has too much alienated from her. I have long been for opening her churchyards to their dead, but I am much more eager to throw wide her gates to their living. It is difficult to speak with patience of such learned simpletons as a Bishop of whom we have lately read, who thinks he is doing service to the Church by flouting and insulting, even in the tomb, men whom he ought to have respected as the ministers of a common faith. Do not let us act like star-gazers who are so intent on the skies that they tumble into the pit at their feet. Do not trouble yourselves about the Pope; he is an old man, he is a long way off, and he can do us very little harm. The pretensions of those who call themselves Anglo-Catholic Priests are far more formidable. They are at our doors, and they are doing a great deal of mischief.

It was to cope with these internal foes that the Public Worship Bill was passed. That measure was the work of no party, it

was the sentence of the nation expressed by an overwhelming majority of Parliament. The opposition to it, though conducted by considerable persons, crumbled away like a sand castle before the sweep of the advancing tide. I hope the Act may do the work which was expected of it—that it will compel the lawless to conform to the law. I do not sympathize with those delicate consciences who scruple to observe the conditions on which they hold their preferment, but who have no scruple whatever in hanging on to their emoluments. The Bill was, I believe, sound in its principles, and it was moderate in its extent. It did not pretend to alter the law nor even to define it. It provided an efficient means of enforcing the law. I think it will be wise, before we embark in any extended legislation, to try the effect of the Act we have passed. I have seen confident predictions that this measure will destroy the Church. It is significant that this assertion proceeds from the persons who were at once the chief opponents of the Bill and the leading enemies of the Church. It is a little strange that if it were about to accomplish their purpose, they should view it with so much dissatisfaction. But the truth is that it is because it will have exactly the opposite effect that they regard it with such hostility. They naturally—and I cannot blame them for it—desire to encourage the clergy in practices which make the Church odious to the nation. It is said we shall have a secession. The menace does not alarm me. We have had secessions before. Indeed, it was not possible to establish the Reformation without many secessions, some voluntary, some involuntary. Queen Elizabeth had to do without the whole Bench of Bishops for six months, and got on very well. The non-jurors were many of them excellent and learned men, but England dispensed with the non-jurors. The remedy may prove severe, but the disease is critical. I believe a capital

operation is necessary to extirpate the cancer, for without it the patient will surely die.

I have detained you too long; I would gladly have avoided topics on which I know the minds of men are greatly divided. But it is for that very reason that I think it is the duty of those who pretend to take a part in public affairs to form a judgment upon them to the best of their ability, and to declare it, without reserve, to those whose confidence they seek. I have never myself been an admirer of what is called a "non-committal" policy. It is neither courageous nor honest, and without honesty and courage public life would be intolerable.

No doubt we live in troubled times—in days when the minds of men are agitated and perplexed. The causes of this distraction are not far to seek. Society is tossed to and fro between Scylla and Charybdis—the Priests and the Philosophers. These two have kept nature of the shuttle-cock order in an everlasting see-saw between superstition and unbelief. Shocked by the dreary vacuity of the one, weak minds seek refuge in the degrading stimulants of the other. It has been the fortune of our race that they have nourished a traditional distrust of Priests, and an instinctive aversion to Philosophers. Long may they continue to do so! They will still preserve a national character at which speculation may sneer, but which history, that records the experience of States, will respect; a native vigour which is proof against an effeminate casuistry, and upon which sophism expends its subtleties in vain; the simple and masculine temper of a stable-minded and a God-fearing people, who have known how in their polity to maintain a sober freedom, and in their religion a reasonable faith.

NOTE TO PAGE 17.

In the Pope's Bull of 1520, condemning the errors of Luther, which was published in England by Wolsey, the 29th "pestiferous error" is as follows:—

"If the Pope, with a great part of the Church, should think so and so, and should not err, yet it is not sin or heresy to think the contrary, especially in a thing not necessary to salvation, until it be by a general council the one rejected, the other approved."—Strype, *Ecc. Mem.* vol. i. cap. 2.

The Bull of 1538, excommunicating Henry VIII., ran thus:—

"The Pope absolved all the king's subjects from their oaths of allegiance and obedience; commanded the nobility, gentry, and others of his realm to expel and depose him from his dominions; declared all leagues with other princes to be null, and they enjoined to renounce all amity with him, or else to lie under interdiction; exhorted and commanded all princes to invade, spoil, and fight against him; gave them a right and property to his ships, goods, and whatsoever pertaineth to him; willed all ecclesiastics publicly to declare him and all his adherents excommunicants by will, book, and candle."—*Ibid.* cap. xliii.

I am not aware that Pius IX. has sought to carry the matter further than this; or that his denunciations are a bit more operative than those of his predecessor. Strype tells us "the sober sort of Papists liked it not" in the sixteenth century any more than they do in the nineteenth. But Popes have always had a bad habit of saying what they please, to which Englishmen have opposed the effectual retort of paying no attention to them.

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